DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 675 EA 012 609

AUTHOR Jackson, Shirley A.
TITLE The State Basic Skills Improvement Efforts Funded Under P.L. 95-561: Title II: Basic Skills Improvement Act. A National Perspective on the South Carolina Basic Skills Objectives Development Effort.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills: Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Aid; *Federal Legislation; *Federal State Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *National Basic Skills Improvement Program; *South Carolina

ABSTRACT

The National Basic Skills Improvement Program is authorized to provide grants and contracts to enable children to master the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and effective communication. In mid-1978 the South Carolina Legislature established the South Carolina Basic Skills Assessment Program. In the first half of 1979 an intensive project was carried out in which statewide basic skills objectives for South Carolina were identified. The project involved the efforts of both a contracting agency and a contractor. This paper, by outlining the components of the federal legislation, provides a national perspective at a symposium centered on the lessons derived from the six-month project. Discussed specifically in relation to the South Carolina project are how to get the most out of a contract and contractor, and whether the development of objectives and tests will improve the basic skills of children. (Author/MLF).

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED185675

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The State Basic Skills Improvement Efforts

Funded Under P.L. 95-561: Title II: Basic Skills Improvement Act

A National Perspective on the South Carolina Basic Skills Objectives Development Effort

Shirley A. Jackson, Director
U.S. Department of Education
Basic Skills Improvement Program

Paper presented as part of a symposium entitled "Multiple Perspectives on a Major Development Effort: The Identification of South Carolina's Basic Sills Objectives" at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, Massachusetts, April 7-11, 1980.

EA 012 609

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Jackson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The State Basic Skills Improvement Efforts Funded under P.L. 95-561: Title II: Basic Skills Improvement Act

Shirley A. Jackson
Director
U.S. Department of Education
Basic Skills Improvement Program

INTRODUCTION

For over two centuries, America has made great strides in meeting the challenge of formal education. Schooling in this country has become almost universal. Today more and more students graduate from high school and more and more graduates are going on to college. Also, in recent years basic skills instruction has been focused on and strengthened at the National, State and local levels.

There is, however, much more to do. While access to education may be more universal, we do not have universal excellence. The challenge that confronts American education is clear. Every citizen must have the skills required to be self-sufficient and to participate effectively in society. All students should master the tools of formal education -- reading, writing, speaking, listening, and the ability to compute. The development of these essential skills has been and must continue to be a top priority of the schools.

In recent years, the States and local school districts have moved aggressively to promote academic excellence. Thirty-six State education departments have established reading, writing, and mathematics standards to be met by students. States have also emphasized teacher education and curriculum development to improve basic skills instruction in the schools.

The time has come to build upon the success of the multiple and diverse basic skills improvement activities in this nation by strengthening the partnership between the Federal Government, the States, and local education agencies. This new partnership must be built upon the recognition that the Federal responsibility is to assist the State in carrying out its fundamental role and constitutional responsibility of providing basic skills to the citizens of the State.

Program Overview

The National Basic Skills Improvement Program is authorized to provide grants and contracts to enable children to master the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and effective communication. The program is divided into three components including:

(a) national activities that support varied approaches to basic skills improvement at the local level

(b) State activities designed to permit coordination of statewide basic skills programs

(c) special activities designed to improve student motivation in reading and mathematics

The program focus of this legislation is not to provide a new add-on program at the State or local level but rather to maximize the effectiveness of the assistance already being provided by stimulating the:

(a) development of comprehensive State and local plans to improve the delivery of basic skills instruction for the children, youth and adults of the State and/or local district

(b) coordination and orchestration of Federal, State and local programs to avoid conflict, unnecessary overlap, duplication, fragmentation in basic skills improvement efforts; creating a synergistic approach to basic skills improvement at the State and local levels.

(c) the development of model basic skills programs which can be used throughout the State to assist with staff and program improvement standards on a systematic basis. Congress stated that it wished to "emphasize that grants awarded and contracts entered into under this Title are to be demonstration in nature. It is hoped that those programs of merit will subsequently be replicated in other school districts and become an integral part of our State educational systems." (Senate Committee Report)

National Basic Skills Legislation Major Parts

Part A - The National Basic Skills Improvement Component consists of three grants programs. They are:

(1) The Basic Skills Improvement in the Schools Program (section 205) which assists projects that demonstrate improved basic skills instruction in the schools;

(2) The Parent Participation Program (section 206), which assists activities that enlist parents and volunteers in teaching basic skills to children; and

(3) The Out-of-School Basic Skills Improvement Program (section 208), which assists projects to help children, youth, and adults improve their basic skills outside the normal school program.

Contracts authorized under Part A are -

(4) Technical Assistance to funded projects (section 204)

(5) Technology in Basic Skills development projects (section 207)

(6) Evaluation and Dissemination of effective basic skills products, processes, and programs (section 209)

Part B - The State Basic Skills Improvement component consists of two programs. They are:

(1) The Formula Grant Program (section 222), which provides support to help a State plan and implement basic skills improvement programs through subgrants by the States to local educational agencies to develop and demonstrate improved delivery of basic skills services and instruction.

(2) The State Leadership Program (sections 221, 224), which provides support for a State to:

. Develop and implement a comprehensive and systematic Statewide program to improve the basic skills achievement of children, youth, and adults by coordination of available Federal and State resources that can impact upon the problem.

. Provide leadership training and technical assistance to local educational agencies in curricula development and the development of comprehensive basic skills improvement plans.

Part C - Special Program for Improving Basic Skills consists of two programs

(1) Reading is Fundamental (sec. 231) is designed to motivate children to read by allowing them to select and own books. The Federal government pays 75% of cost of books, the non-profit group or public agency sponsoring the activity pays 25% except for migrant groups where the Federal government pays 100% of the cost of books.

(2) Special Mathematics Program (sec 232) is designed to teach advanced level mathematics skills to disadvantaged students using qualified mathematics instructors.

State Program Focus

Grants are being made to State education departments to support their efforts in coordinating all Federal dollars that support basic skills. In addition, the Director of the Basic Skills program is heading an interagency effort to provide coordination of basic skills programs at the Federal level. Both

efforts promise to result in a more efficient use of Federal dollars and a markedly improved system of delivering services.

Title II of the Education Amendments of 1978 provides a unique opportunity to meet the challenges of wide spread basic skills improvement in this nation in its implementation of Part B of this new legislation. The Chief State School Officers and the Department of Education worked out together, then signed, a Basic Skills Preamble and an agreement to work together in the following ways to strengthen basic skills instruction:

(1) The State agrees to develop an individualized statewide basic skills improvement plan or to expand its existing plan. The statewide basic skills plan will include the following:

- o Identification of the areas in which basic skills improvements are needed;
- o A clear statement of short-and long-range objectives;
- o A specific plan to achieve these objectives including a description of the way State and Federal programs will be coordinated;
- o An evaluation plan to determine if objectives have been met; and
- o A clear description of the way nonpublic schools will be included in the plan.

(2) The State and the Federal Government agree to work together to ensure that grants under the nationally funded basic skills programs (Part A of Title II) are consistent with the statewide plan. The State will review applications for grants under these programs to ensure that they support the basic skills plan.

(3) The Federal Government agrees to coordinate the efforts of its many programs which influence State basic skills activities. This is being accomplished through the Steering Committee for Basic Skills Coordination, composed of 22 programs with basic skills improvement goals (such as Title I, Teacher Corps, Teacher Centers, Handicapped, etc.).

The administration of these State programs have promoted a new Federal State relationship by involving the Chief State School Officers in the overall plans for administering and implementing this legislation, in fostering a voluntary collaboration with the Federal government through individualized agreements which allowed an unusually high degree of discretion for States to work with their constituencies to determine their need and program emphasis within the confines of the law, which served to emphasize and encourage the strengthening of leadership and positive action that States can bring to bear on the problem.

This cooperative venture is entered into with the confidence that a new Federal, State partnership, undergirded by cooperation and trust, can strengthen the quality of education in this nation and serve all students better.

SUMMARY OF GENERAL CONTENT OF STATE AGREEMENTS

PURPOSE

The purpose of the State Agreements is to provide financial assistance to States to enable them to develop comprehensive and systematic statewide plans for improving the achievement of students in the basic skills. Included in these plans will be training and technical assistance to school districts, leadership in the planning, execution and evaluation of local programs, and development of means by which parents can be involved in the education of their children.

CONTENT OF PLANS

The State agreements involve two parts: a State Leadership Program (Section 224) and a Formula Grant Program (Section 222).

Section 224: "Agreements with State Education Agencies" focuses on coordination of all the States basic skills programs and the development of comprehensive State basic skills plans. Section 222 is largely (at least 70% of the funds by law) designed to provide funds to selected local districts through subgrants for local school improvement in the area of teaching basic skills.

Fifty-six (56) agreements have been signed with States and territories. All State Education Agencies have reacted positively to these programs. All but two States (Missouri and Idaho) will participate in both sections of the program and one (1), New Mexico, has expressed a desire to follow the basic tenets of the program and has in fact signed the Basic Skills Agreement Preamble. The National Basic Skills State Coordination Branch Staff is prepared to assist States in the further development and refinement of their plans over the next several months.

Section 224 - STATE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Under Section 224 States have planned two main activities:

(1) prepare personnel throughout the State to carry out demonstration programs which have been effective in overcoming deficiencies in the basic skills

(2) develop statewide plans for improving the basic skills of children, youth and adults depending on what the States have determined to by their priority needs.

The plans include:

(1) activities to assess the needs of students and instructional personnel

(2) inservice training for administrators and teachers

(3) follow-up technical assistance

(4) activities to involve the parents in developing strategies to improve instruction and

(5) activities which coordinate Federal and State programs in order to avoid duplication efforts.

SECTION 222 - FORMULA GRANT PROGRAM

Under Section 222, all the States have provided assurances that they will distribute at least 70% of their grants to LEA's to carry out programs that will improve the basic skills of children, youth and adults. Specific activities will differ for each school district depending on the particular needs of their population. Certain criteria have been set up by the States to consider the size of the population to be served, the relative needs of different population groups and the financial ability of the Local Education Agency (LEA). Special consideration has been given to LEA's with high concentrations of underachievers. Activities to be carried out by LEA's include diagnostic assessment, development of learning goals and objectives, development of instructional plans, the training of teachers to carry out those plans in the classroom, development of materials for parents to use at home to improve the performance of children, the training of parents to teach their children and serve as volunteers at schools, procedures for evaluation, collection of data and dissemination of information on promising practices and effective programs.

The approved plans which must have public comment and the Governor's signature, will be used by the SEA as a management tool to more effectively coordinate all of the State administered programs and resources in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics and oral communication.

South Carolina's Basic Skills Objectives Identification Project

It is within the framework and context of the legislative intent and new Federal - State relationship established under Title II, Part B. State Basic Skills Improvement Program that I wish to make a few brief comments on the "Multiple Perspectives on a Major Development Effort: The Identification of South Carolina's Basic Skills Objectives" papers by W. James Popham, Contractor, University of California, Los Angeles; Elaine Lindheim, Director of Test Development, Instructional Objectives Exchange; Vana H. Meredith, Chief Supervisor of the South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Research; and Paul D. Sandifer, Director of the South Carolina's Department of Education's Office of Research.

I have two areas of observations and discussion:

(1) HOW DO YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF A CONTRACT AND CONTRACTOR?

The Request for Proposal (RFP) process is one very commonly used by the Federal government, thus by the Basic Skills program when we are attempting to purchase a specific service or product. The process that we have found successful is very much the one described in the papers. We, too, have found the keys to getting good products from contractors to be:

a. specific description of the content and specifications of products and expectations in the RFP and the resultant proposal; especially the objectives, major activities, timelines and products to be delivered.

b. careful delineation of review points and decision points with the specifics on who is to review what, by when, and what the contractor must do about the revisions submitted to him by the program officer and by when.

c. close monitoring of the timeline and review of the product <u>as</u> it is being developed, not <u>after</u> it has been developed. This mandates a collaborative relationship between the funding agency and the contractor.

d. careful review of the staff capabilities and corporate experiences of the contract in the area to be developed. One hardly has the time nor inclination to "train" a contractor to do the job. On the other hand the project officer also must be knowledgeable, as the contractor hardly has the time nor inclination to "train" a project officer.

The contracting process as used by the South Carolina State Department of Education, can be very useful in buying temporary expertise to provide a particular, short-term service and/or to develop a product such as

identification of statewide basic skills objectives in reading, writing, and mathematics for grades 1 - 12 as was borne out by this project.

(2) WILL THE DEVELOPMENT OF OBJECTIVES AND TESTS IMPROVE THE BASIC SKILLS OF CHILDREN?

"The Improvement of Educational Practice" focus addressed by W. James Popham and the South Carolina legislation is key to basic skills improvement. Simply identifying objectives and developing tests, either norm referenced or criterion - referenced measures, will not improve the basic skills of the children of South Carolina nor any other State.

Instructional programs/strategies, cued in to developing the objectives, and massive staff development efforts throughout the State will be essential to making this project effective as a basic skills improvement effort. Happily, under Title II two services can be provided to support these efforts. They have been incorporated in the South Carolina Basic Skills Plan of which Dr. Anne Elam is the Coordinator.

1. State Leadership and Training Efforts - (Section 224)

Based on the assessed needs, the State can use Title II funds to develop a four (4) year plan designed to overcome the deficiencies highlighted by the assessment and to use all of the available Federal and State resources available in a synergistic approach to solving the problems. State leadership and training efforts can allow the State to assess the needs of its population based on the objectives, provide training to local education agency leaders in strategies for overcoming the deficiencies highlighted by the assessment, and to provide follow-up, on-site technical assistance to persons participating in the training.

2. State Formula Grant Program - (Section 222)

After the State has trained leaders in developing comprehensive basic skills improvement plans under Section 224, they may provide them with a small grant to develop and implement their comprehensive plans in their schools, provide inservice training for their staffs on the objectives, related instructional strategies and tests, and provide parent involvement programs to support the school's instructional efforts.

The good thing about projects such as this one and the mandated competency assessment programs is they require States, schools, and teachers to determine at a very specific level what they want children to be able to achieve in basic skills and other identified areas.

There are eight (8) areas of weakness often found in State department efforts to identify objectives and test them that happily are not evidenced in the South Carolina Title II Basic Skills Improvement Comprehensive Plan.

They are:

(1) Failure to pilot-test or field test the objectives and tests on varied populations and to study the implications of the results and plan to prevent potential problems highlighted by the pilot-testing.

(2) Lack of a comprehensive strategy to improve instruction for children based on the new expectations.

(3) Lack of a dissemination system that includes an inservice plan for administrators and teachers on how to use the objectives and assessments to improve the delivery of basic skills instruction.

(4) Lack of time provided to instruct students in the newly identified areas prior to conducting a massive testing program to determine promotion or graduation.

(5) Failure to match State objectives and tests with LEA classroom instruction, materials, and assessment programs and to carefully match both of these elements with the instructional needs of each student.

(6) Failure to use what we already know from the research, promising practices, our practical experiences and common sense about basic skills improvement - not reinventing the wheel.

(7) Failure to coordinate and effectively use all available resources to improve the existing program rather than "tacking on" another entity which will further fragment instruction for students.

(8) Failure to have broad based lay and professional participation in the development/review of the objectives, tests, materials and plans.

The legislation establishing the South Carolina Basic Skills Assessment Program enacted in August, 1978 and the Title II: Basic Skills Plan developers in the State seem to have been aware of these potential hazards (Sandifer p. 1) and planned to avoid them. With the direction of the State legislation, the fine leadership provided by the Chief State School Officer, Honorable Charles G. Williams, the exceptional State staff, the contractors who are willing to go the next steps in assisting in the development and implementation of the plan and the National Basic Skills Office's commitment to support South Carolina's State Basic Skills Improvement Plan, there is no doubt that the basic skills improvement efforts of South Carolina are destined to be eminent on the State and National horizons.

There are three reasons that dictate continued mutual cooperation at the Federal and State levels:

(1) Federal legislation, which has grown out of varied needs over time has caused many of the basic skills improvement coordination problems that currently exist at the State and local levels and fairness dictates that the Feds help in the resolution of this problem. P.L. 95-561 gives us a tremendous opportunity to address this problem with a relatively small amount of money.

(2) The need and public desire for basic skills improvement is evident. The public is demanding that we find better methods and products for teaching the basic skills while at the same time we find better techniques for the management and utilization of existing resources. They don't plan to provide us much, if any, additional money at the Federal, State and/or local levels.

(3) Education is a Federal Concern and State Responsibility. To improve the basic skills in this country demands assisting the States in planning their strategies from their unique perspectives and needs, encouraging them to use Federal resources more efficiently, facilitating a national sharing of knowledge among States, assisting and encouraging States to provide strong leadership in basic skills improvement, and disseminating information on what's working in State efforts. This is an appropriate role for the Department of Education's Basic Skills Improvement Program and one that we look forward to implementing with your support.

The public mood dictates that we at the Federal, State and local levels, find better ways to do more in basic skills improvement with less or the same resources - and we are on our way to doing it in the nation and in South Carolina.